THE EXISTENCE OF GOD DEMONSTRATED FROM THE WORKS OF CREATION.

A

SERMON,

PREACHED ON

LORD'S DAY MORNING,

AUGUST 9, 1795,

IN THE

REV. DR. *HITCHCOCK*'S MEETING-HOUSE,

IN

PROVIDENCE.

BY *JONATHAN MAXCY*, A. M.
PRESIDENT OF RHODE-ISLAND COLLEGE.

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SERMON.

TO THE

YOUNG GENTLEMEN,

Students of Rhode-Island College;

OVER WHOM I HAVE THE HONOUR AS WELL AS

THE PLEASURE TO PRESIDE,

I MOST AFFECTIONATELY RECOMMEND THE MOST

SERIOUS ATTENTION TO THE

IMPORTANT TRUTH BROUGHT FORWARD AND ILLUSTRATED

IN THE FOLLOWING

SERMON.

J. Maxcy.

THE EXISTENCE OF GOD.

ROMANS i. 20.

For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead.

NOTHING will more effectually guard us against vice, than a firm belief of the existence of God. For surely if we realize that there is such a Being, we shall naturally infer from his perfections, from the nature of his moral government, and from our situation as rational creatures, that we are amenable at his awful tribunal. Superior power, wisdom and goodness, always lay us under restraint, and command our veneration. These, even in a mortal, overawe us. They restrain not only the actions, but the words and thoughts of the most vicious and abandoned. Our happiness depends on our virtue. Our virtue depends on the conformity of our hearts and conduct to the laws prescribed us by our beneficent Creator. Of what vast importance then is it to our present as well as future felicity, to possess in our hearts a feeling sense, and in our understandings a clear conviction, of the existence of that Being whose power and goodness are unbounded, whose presence fills immensity, and whose wisdom, like a torrent of lightning, emanates through all the

the dark receſſes of eternal duration! How great muſt be the effect of a ſenſe of the preſence of the great Creator and Governor of all things, to whom belong the attributes, eternity, independency, perfect holineſs, inflexible juſtice, and inviolable veracity; complete happineſs and glorious majeſty; ſupreme right and unbounded dominion! A ſenſe of accountability to God will retard the eager purſuit of vice; it will humble the heart of the proud, it will bridle the tongue of the prophane, and ſnatch the knife from the hand of the aſſaſſin. A belief of the exiſtence of God is the true original ſource of all virtue, and the only foundation of all religion, natural or revealed. Set aſide this great luminous truth, eraſe the conviction of it from the heart, you then place virtue and vice on the ſame level; you drive afflicted innocence into deſpair; you add new effrontery to the marred viſage of guilt; you plant thorns in the path, and ſhed an impenetrable gloom over the proſpects of the righteous.—Sin has alienated the affections, and diverted the attention of men from the great Jehovah. "Darkneſs has covered the earth, and groſs darkneſs the people." Men have worſhipped the works of their own hands, and neglected the true God, though his exiſtence and perfections were ſtamped in glaring characters on all creation. From the regularity, order, beauty and conſervation of this great ſyſtem of things, of which man makes a part; from the uniform tendency of all its diviſions to their proper ends; the exiſtence of God ſhines as clearly as the ſun in the heavens.—"From the things that are made (ſays the text) are ſeen his eternal power and Godhead."

1. Man

1. MAN himſelf is a proof of God's exiſtence. Let us place him before us in his full ſtature. We are at once impreſſed with the beautiful organization of his body, with the orderly and harmonious arrangement of his members. Such is the diſpoſition of theſe, that their motion is the moſt eaſy, graceful and uſeful, that can be conceived. We are aſtoniſhed to ſee the ſame ſimple matter diverſified into ſo many different ſubſtances, of different qualities, ſize, and figure. If we purſue our reſearches through the internal œconomy, we ſhall find, that all the different oppoſite parts correſpond to each other with the utmoſt exactneſs and order; that they all anſwer the moſt beneficent purpoſes. This wonderful machine, the human body, is animated, cheriſhed and preſerved, by a ſpirit within, which pervades every particle, feels in every organ, warns us of injury, and adminiſters to our pleaſures. Erect in ſtature, man differs from all other animals. Though his foot is confined to the earth, yet his eye meaſures the whole circuit of heaven, and in an inſtant takes in thouſands of worlds. His countenance is turned upward, to teach us that he is not like other animals, limited to the earth, but looks forward to brighter ſcenes of exiſtence in the ſkies.—Whence came this erect, orderly, beautiful conſtitution of the human body? Did it ſpring up from the earth ſelf-formed? Surely not. Earth itſelf is inactive matter. That which has no motion can never produce any. Man ſurely could not, as has been vainly and idly ſuppoſed, have been formed by the fortuitous concurrence of atoms. We behold the moſt exact order in the conſtitution of the human body. Order always involves deſign.—Deſign always involves intelligence.—

That

That intelligence which directed the orderly formation of the human body, muſt have reſided in a Being whoſe power was adequate to the production of ſuch an effect. Creation ſurely is the prerogative of a ſelf-exiſtent, uncauſed Being. Finite creatures may arrange and diſpoſe, but they cannot create; they cannot give life. It is an univerſal law through all nature, that like produces like. The ſame laws moſt probably obtain through the whole ſyſtem in which we are connected. We have therefore no reaſon to ſuppoſe that angels created man. Neither can we, without the greateſt abſurdity, admit, that he was formed by himſelf, or by mere accident. If in the latter way, why do we never ſee men formed ſo in the preſent day?—Why do we never ſee the clods of earth brightening into human fleſh, and the duſt under our feet crawling into animated forms, and ſtarting up into life and intelligence? If we even admit that either of the forementioned cauſes might have produced man, yet neither of them could have preſerved him in exiſtence one moment. There muſt therefore be a God uncauſed, independent and complete. The nobler part of man clearly evinces this great truth. When we conſider the boundleſs deſires and the inconceivable activity of the ſoul of man, we can refer his origin to nothing but God. How aſtoniſhing are the reaſoning faculties of man! How ſurprizing the power of comparing, arranging and connecting his ideas! How wonderful is the power of imagination! On its wings, in a moment, we can tranſport ourſelves to the moſt diſtant part of the univerſe. We can fly back, and live the lives of all antiquity, or ſurmount the limits of time, and ſail along the vaſt range of eternity.

nity. Whence these astonishing powers, if not from a God of infinite wisdom, goodness and power?

2. "The invisible things of him from the creation of the world," says the text, "are clearly seen." Let us for a moment behold our earth. With what a delightful scene are we here presented! The diversification of its surface into land and water, islands and lakes, springs and rivers, hills and vallies, mountains and plains, renders it to man doubly enchanting. We are entertained with an agreeable variety, without being disgusted by a tedious uniformity. Every thing appears admirably formed for our profit and delight. There the vallies are cloathed in smiling green, and the plains are bending with corn. Here is the gentle hill to delight the eye, and beyond, slow rising from the earth, swells the huge mountain, and, with all its load of waters, rocks and woods, heaves itself up into the skies. Why this pleasing, vast deformity of nature? Undoubtedly for the benefit of man. From the mountains descend streams to fertilize the plains below, and cover them with wealth and beauty. The earth not only produces every thing necessary to support our bodies, but to remedy our diseases, and gratify our senses. Who covered the earth with such a pleasing variety of fruits and flowers? Who gave them their delightful fragrance, and painted them with such exquisite colours? Who causes the same water to whiten in the lily, that blushes in the rose? Do not these things indicate a Cause infinitely superior to any finite being? Do they not directly lead us to believe the existence of God, to ad-

mire his goodneſs, to revere his power, to adore his wiſdom, in ſo happily accommodating our external circumſtances to our ſituation and internal conſtitution?

3. But how are we aſtoniſhed to behold the vaſt ocean, rolling its immenſe burden of waters! Who gave it ſuch a configuration of particles as to render it moveable by the leaſt preſſure, and at the ſame time ſo ſtrong as to ſupport the heavieſt weights? Who ſpread out this vaſt highway of all the nations under heaven? Who gave it its regular motion? Who confined it within its bounds? A little more motion would diſorder the whole world! A ſmall incitement on the tide would drown whole kingdoms. Who reſtrains the proud waves, when the tempeſt lifts them to the clouds? Who meaſured the great waters, and ſubjected them to invariable laws? That great Being, "who placed the ſand for the bound thereof by a perpetual decree that it cannot paſs; and though the waves thereof toſs themſelves, yet can they not prevail; though they roar, yet can they not paſs over." With reaſon may we believe, that from the things that are made, are clearly ſeen eternal power and wiſdom.

4. Passing by the numerous productions and appendages of the earth, let us riſe from it, and conſider the body of air with which we are ſurrounded. What a covincing proof do we here find of the exiſtence of God! Such is the ſubtilty and tranſparency of the air, that it receives the rays of the ſun and ſtars, conveying them with inconceivable velocity to objects on the earth, rendering them viſible, and decorating the whole

ſurface

ſurface of the globe with an agreeable intermixture of light, ſhade and colours. But ſtill this air has a ſufficient conſiſtency and ſtrength to ſupport clouds, and all the winged inhabitants. Had it been leſs ſubtile, it would have intercepted the light. Had it been more rarified, it would not have ſupported its inhabitants, nor have afforded ſufficient moiſture for the purpoſes of reſpiration. What then but infinite wiſdom could have tempered the air ſo nicely, as to give it ſufficient ſtrength to ſupport clouds for rain, to afford wind for health, and at the ſame time to poſſeſs the power of conveying ſound and light? How wonderful is this element! How clearly does it diſcover infinite wiſdom, power and goodneſs!

5. But when we caſt our eyes up to the firmament of heaven, we clearly ſee that it declares God's handy work. Here the immenſe theatre of God's works opens upon us, and diſcloſes ten thouſand magnificent, ſplendid objects. We dwindle to nothing in compariſon of this auguſt ſcene of beauty, majeſty and glory. Who reared this vaſt arch over our heads? Who adorned it with ſo many ſhining objects, placed at ſuch immenſe diſtances from each other, regular in their motions, invariably obſerving the laws to which they were originally ſubjected? Who placed the ſun at ſuch a convenient diſtance as not to annoy, but refreſh us? Who for ſo many ages has cauſed him to riſe and ſet at fixed times? Whoſe hand directs, and whoſe power reſtrains him in his courſe, cauſing him to produce the agreeable changes of day and night, as well as the variety of ſeaſons? The order, harmony and regularity, in the revolutions of the heavenly bodies, are

ſuch inconteſtible proofs of the exiſtence of God, that an eminent poet well ſaid, "an undevout aſtronomer is mad." In the time of Cicero, when the knowledge of aſtronomy was very imperfect, he did not heſitate to declare, that in his opinion the man who aſſerted the heavenly bodies were not framed and moved by a divine underſtanding, was himſelf void of all underſtanding. Well indeed is it ſaid, that the heavens declare the glory of God.

THIS great Being is every where preſent. He exiſts all around us. He is not, as we are apt to imagine, at a great diſtance. Wherever we turn, his image meets our view. We ſee him in the earth, in the ocean, in the air, in the ſun, moon and ſtars. We feel him in ourſelves. He is always working round us; he performs the greateſt operations, produces the nobleſt effects, diſcovers himſelf in a thouſand different ways, and yet the real GOD remains unſeen. All parts of creation are equally under his inſpection. Though he warms the breaſt of the higheſt angel in heaven, yet he breathes life into the meaneſt inſect on earth. He lives through all his works, ſupporting all by the word of his power. He ſhines in the verdure that cloathes the plains, in the lily that delights the vale, and in the foreſt that waves on the mountain. He ſupports the ſlender reed that trembles in the breeze, and the ſturdy oak that defies the tempeſt. His preſence cheers the inanimate creation. Far in the wilderneſs, where human eye never ſaw, where the ſavage foot never trod, there he bids the blooming foreſt ſmile, and the bluſhing roſe open its leaves to the morning ſun. There he cauſes the feathered inhabitants

to whiſtle their wild notes to the liſtening trees and echoing mountains. There nature lives in all her wanton wildneſs. There the raviſhed eye, hurrying from ſcene to ſcene, is loſt in one vaſt bluſh of beauty. From the dark ſtream that rolls through the foreſt, the ſilver-ſcaled fiſh leap up, and dumbly mean the praiſe of God. Though man remains ſilent, yet God will have praiſe. He regards, obſerves, upholds, connects and equals all.

THE belief of his exiſtence is not a point of mere ſpeculation and amuſement. It is of inconceivable importance to our preſent as well as future felicity. But while we believe there is a God, we ſhould be extremely careful to aſcertain, with as much accuracy as poſſible, what is his real nature. The moſt prominent features of this are exhibited in that incomprehenſible diſplay of wiſdom, power and goodneſs, made in the works of creation. A virtuous man ſtands in a relation to God which is peculiarly delightful. The divine perfections are all engaged in his defence. He feels powerful in God's power, wiſe in his wiſdom, good in his goodneſs. The vicious man, on the contrary, ſtands in a relation to God which is of all things the moſt dreadful. He is unwilling to know that God has ſufficient wiſdom to ſearch out all his wickedneſs, ſufficient goodneſs to the univerſe to determine to puniſh that wickedneſs, and ſufficient power to execute that determination. A firm belief in the exiſtence of God will heighten all the enjoyments of life, and, by conforming our hearts to his will, will ſecure the approbation of a good conſcience, and inſpire us with the hopes of a bleſſed immortality.

NEVER be tempted to diſbelieve the exiſtence of God, when every thing around you proclaims it in a language too plain not to be underſtood. Never caſt your eyes on creation without having your ſouls expanded with this ſentiment, "There is a God." When you ſurvey this globe of earth, with all its appendages; when you behold it inhabited by numberleſs ranks of creatures, all moving in their proper ſpheres, all verging to their proper ends, all animated by the ſame great ſource of life, all ſupported at the ſame great bounteous table; when you behold not only the earth, but the ocean and the air, ſwarming with living creatures, all happy in their ſituation; when you behold yonder ſun, darting a vaſt blaze of glory over the heavens, garniſhing mighty worlds, and waking ten thouſand ſongs of praiſe; when you behold unnumbered ſyſtems diffuſed through vaſt immenſity, cloathed in ſplendour, and rolling in majeſty; when you behold theſe things, your affections will riſe above all the vanities of time; your full ſouls will ſtruggle with extacy, and your reaſon, paſſions and feelings, all united, will ruſh up to the ſkies, with a devout acknowledgment of the exiſtence, power, wiſdom and goodneſs of God. Let us behold him, let us wonder, let us praiſe and adore. Theſe things will make us happy. They will wean us from vice, and attach us to virtue. As a belief of the exiſtence of God is a fundamental point of ſalvation, he who denies it runs the greateſt conceivable hazard. He reſigns the ſatisfaction of a good conſcience, quits the hopes of a happy immortality, and expoſes himſelf to deſtruction. All this for what? for the ſhort-lived pleaſures of a riotous, diſſolute life. How wretched, when he finds

finds his atheiſtical confidence totally diſappointed. Inſtead of his beloved ſleep and inſenſibility, with which he ſo fondly flattered himſelf, he will find himſelf ſtill exiſting after death, removed to a ſtrange place; he will then find that there is a God, who will not ſuffer his rational creatures to fall into annihilation as a refuge from the juſt puniſhment of their crimes; he will find himſelf doomed to drag on a wretched train of exiſtence in unavailing woe and lamentation. Alas! how aſtoniſhed will he be to find himſelf plunged in the abyſs of ruin and deſperation! God forbid that any of us ſhould act ſo unwiſely as to diſbelieve, when every thing around us proclaims, his exiſtence!

FINIS.